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A parent's appeal to the
members of both houses...

Tunbridge Wells

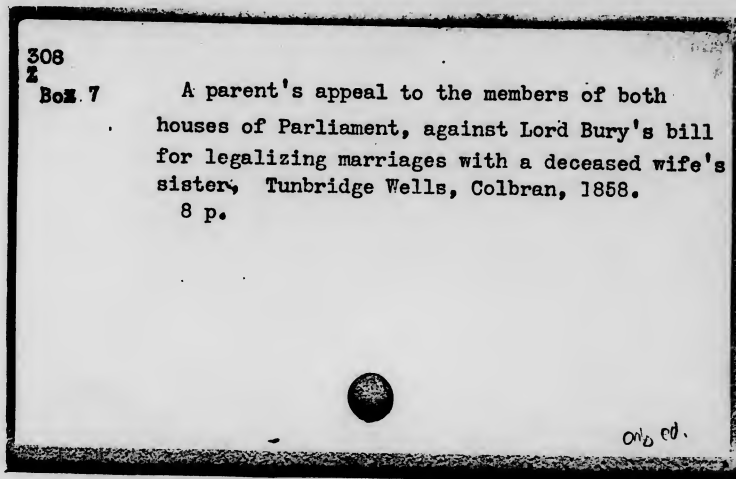
1858

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A PARENT'S APPEAL

TO

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THE MEMBERS

OF BOTH

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT,

AGAINST

LORD BURY'S BILL

FOR LEGALIZING

Marriages with a Deceased Wife's Sister.

TUNBRIDGE WELLS:

PRINTED BY HENRY S. COLBRAN,

NEAR THE TOWN HALL.

1858.

THE APPEAL

ON behalf of many households, I entreat you to persevere in opposing the Bill for Legalizing Marriages with a Deceased Wife's Sister.

Let it not be supposed, that because women do not petition, or speak out, that they have nothing to ask, or to say. I believe they are nearly unanimous against the Bill.

It is so little the habit of women in this country to consider public questions, and so much less to influence them, that they find it an effort disagreeable and difficult even to attach a name to a petition—and I am persuaded that the petitions from women in favor of the Bill, were obtained *by men* for personal or political motives.

If this Bill become Law, domestic happiness will be entirely destroyed in many households; ease and security will be banished from many more; and an element of danger and mistrust will be introduced into a large proportion. And who shall say, that unhappiness is the worst result to be apprehended, and that opportunity will not sometimes invite crime? It is no new thing, even now, for a wife to be "removed" by the sister and the husband. If any one doubt

that facilities act as a temptation to sin, let them consider the wholesale poisonings occasioned by Burial Clubs.

It is often said, that on the Continent no evil results from the option of these marriages. But Continental life is widely different from ours. Each home with us, is its own universe of joy and sorrow. The climate, the hours, the whole habits and natures of English people, make them intensely "inpermost," as the Germans say. If you invade this interior by placing any there whose interest or inclination it may be, by the remotest possibility, to create coldness, or variance, you do a great deal towards inviting the Serpent into Eden. At least, you allow him to peep in. But, setting aside the uglier possibility, supposing every person concerned to be as excellent as any theorist can desire, see to what some very probable coincidences may lead. Suppose a common case:—A wife, once radiant and lovely, fading under household cares and many children; her husband affectionately solicitous, desiring to gratify her by a long visit from the young sister just opening into life;—and as things stand now, nothing can be a happier arrangement;—the sick wife is thankful that Edward's amusement is so well provided for, while she is lying on the sofa; Edward rejoices that Fanny has some one to keep up her spirits, and give no trouble; Mary beyond measure glad to escape from the school-room, and be treated like a woman. So all are happy. But allow the possibility of Mary ever marrying her brother-in-law, and do you not see at once the little cloud arising, no bigger than one's hand, which may, in time, overshadow the house with gloom or tempest? All parties may be well-meaning and amiable. But men grow old much more slowly than their wives. Edward finds that he is still a young man, and

that it is pleasanter to share the freshness of life with Mary, than its inglorious and teasing troubles with her poor sister, who, between a strong wish to do right, a devoted love of her husband, a dread of being unjust or over-sensitive, and a constant effort at self-control, becomes daily more unhappy and helpless, more incapable of comfort from any prospect but one, that of course is the chance of Mary's speedy marriage. Some Cælebs of the neighbourhood makes up to her, and a month ago, this incident might have brought sunshine again to all. But now, Edward thinks of VISCOUNT BURY; and though he may not put his thoughts into words, he resolves on keeping Cælebs at a distance. "Fanny is in very uncertain health, poor thing! I am sure I will take all the care I can of her; but if——" Perhaps, in consequence of this possibility, the house of the brother-in-law ceases to be a home for Mary. And how many single women, from youth to middle age, would be in the like manner deprived of a valuable protection! It is no answer to say, the parties are not obliged to fall in love. When Divorce was in question, it appeared a reply quite sufficient to most minds, that to make freedom unattainable, actually prevents the wish for it. It is no answer to say, "the wife has the remedy in her own hands, she may banish her sister." It is probable she may not have the power—if she has, it is *not* a remedy. There exists no remedy for the pain, doubt, and torment she must go through before she can even dream of such a step. It is no answer to say, "the wife's sister is not more dangerous than any other young girl, who might be equally intimate with the husband." *No other can be so intimate.* And even now, with a salutary prohibition in force, it needs not much experience or observa-

tion to convince an unbiassed mind, that human infirmity is unable to stand alone.

It is not yet many years since this occurred in England :— a family, who seemed opulent, came into a country neighbourhood; declined all visiting, were seen only at church; the gentleman excused himself on the plea of his wife's health, and said her sister never left her. Six or seven years after, the wife died, and on her deathbed, the story was revealed to the clergyman, who from some hint of a servant, refused to be kept out of the house; exactly the facts which we have been told can never happen; the wife crushed and heart-broken; the guilty sister mistress of the house. Nor yet many years since I saw this case :—two young persons lived in perfect happiness, till a sister of sixteen came to be taken care of, during a few weeks journey of her parents. The wife some time after wrote an earnest request to her mother to remove the young girl immediately. The mother, as unsuspecting as if she had been a Member of Parliament, answered, "you can surely put up with a little inconvenience till I can fetch her myself." And when this time came, it was *too late*. The poor girl vanished, and was heard of no more. But, thanks to the prohibition now complained of, the separation of the married pair was but temporary; and I believe, they long lived happily together. Such instances might be multiplied, if respect for the feelings of living persons did not compel silence.

It is said, the aunt is the best guardian of her dead sister's children. So truly she is; *but only so long as she is not their step-mother.* If she has children of her own, do you suppose they will not supplant the nephews or nieces? I know one

such case, and the first wife's family regarded the married aunt with intense dislike.

If these marriages were made possible, the widower's children would lose their spinster aunts entirely. He must make them over to a governess, or marry again. Either case is deplorable. And what can be happier and wiser for all concerned, than such an arrangement as I have seen in a worthy family, the young man removing with his baby daughters to his father-in-law's house; finding there, first consolation, and then a cheerful home; the children admirably educated; the wish to re-marry averted for many years, till the changes wrought by time had made it a not undesirable act.

While I write, I receive a letter from Yorkshire. "My children are well, and while their dear aunt remains with us, I am consoled as to them for the loss which can never be repaired to *me*. But she will probably marry in the autumn, and I must be thankful that this prolonged engagement has spared her to help us these three sad years." It is clear that LORD BURX's legislation, would have prevented entirely such help.

Now who would be "relieved" by this measure? A few men who have attached themselves to a *forbidden* object. And the interests of those few are to outweigh those of the wives, widowers, spinsters, and children which will be affected.—For the interest of those men, loving Sisters are to be changed into possible Wives, affectionate Brothers into possible Suitors.

Consider the delightful Traddle's protecting Sophy's nine sisters; how happily Sophy crams five of them into the rooms

only just large enough for themselves; how joyous they all are, hanging about him "with an amount of kissing, such as I never saw inflicted before on any mortal head," and remark how this continued into Traddle's prosperity, which was shared (thanks to prohibitory law) by the whole family—how "they were always a crowd, somehow, in the large house, all pretty, a perfect nest of roses," running to meet the parental brother-in-law, "handing him about to be kissed, till he is out of breath;" and the unlucky Beauty, with her orphan child, taking up her abode there; now, besides that, Sophy was the eldest of these roses—a little older than her husband, too; does not one see at once, that not only innocence, but the most absolute and unquestionable security is indispensable to this happy state of things?

There are plenty of Traddles and Sophys in the world still, who will never obtain a charming Biographer. But let LORD BURX's Bill pass, and the possibility of all this happiness passes too. And my poor widowed neighbour, who was looking from her dying bed to her eldest daughter's house as a safe home for the little one, must set about preparing her to be a governess; for she knows life too well to risk the happiness of one, and perhaps the virtue of the other, when rash hands have torn away the barrier that now fences both.

On Good-Friday last, the papers announced that "Hester Smith, a middle aged woman, was charged before MR. BURCHAM with attempting suicide. Prisoner said, her husband had left her, and was living with her sister. That so preyed on her mind, that in a moment of despair, she tried to drown herself. She was thankful, now, that she had been saved."

Can any one doubt that LORD BURX's Bill holds out a great temptation to men, to drive the wives they are tired of, to

suicide? Or, that instead of self-murder, there may perhaps be another kind?

It has been asked, are Englishwomen so vicious that nothing but Law can control them? Probably, they are not more vicious than men and women, all the world over. Perhaps less. But the clear and strong instinct of virtue is to say, "lead us not into temptation." And there is no dissuasion from sin so valuable, as the making it impossible. Even already, these mere discussions have done harm, and brought disquiet into hearts and homes, where before there was perfect peace. For the sake of these and all, be merciful, and reject the Bill.

FINIS.

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